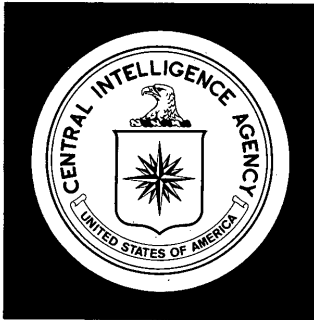




The President's Daily Brief

November 18, 1975

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FOR THE PRESIDENT ONLY

SYRIA

UN officials in the Middle East are said to be convinced that Syria will renew the mandate of the observer forces stationed on the Golan Heights, due to expire on November 30.

Lieutenant General Silasvuo, the UN coordinator of Middle Eastern peacekeeping operations, reportedly came away from talks last week with Syrian Defense Minister Talas and chief of staff Shihabi so convinced that Syria would extend the mandate that he has advised Secretary General Waldheim that he need not make a special visit to Damascus at this time.

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President Asad and his advisers may have concluded that Syria has no attractive alternatives and must therefore renew the mandate. Nevertheless, we are puzzled by these reports since we still expect the Syrians to withhold formal approval until the last moment in hopes of obtaining some diplomatic quid pro quo from the US and Israel.

LEBANON

Interior Minister Shamun announced yesterday that a new 300-man government security force will begin patrolling Beirut today. The heavily armed unit will attempt to stop the kidnaping, sniping, and looting that continue to threaten the two-week-old cease-fire.

Shamun, the most powerful Christian in the cabinet, emphasized that the force is composed of "commandos" from both the Lebanese army and the internal security force. Shamun has been arguing for greater use of the army, and he will interpret the cabinet's approval of the special unit as a victory over Prime Minister Karami.

Karami, a Muslim, has referred to the unit only as a "special detachment" of the regular security service. The Prime Minister recently has had great difficulty controlling some of his radical followers and must minimize any concessions to the Christians.

Karami apparently allowed the security unit to be formed in return for Christian acceptance--at least in principle--of his proposals for political and economic reforms. The cabinet agreed last Saturday that Karami and President Franjiah should together formulate specific proposals for ensuring Muslim and Christian equality in parliament and the civil service, for limiting unemployment, and for stimulating economic recovery.

The right-wing Phalangists, who are not represented in the cabinet, have offered cautious approval of Karami's proposals. They are relieved that the Prime Minister is not now threatening a formal reduction of the powers of the Christian president, and that his program falls short of the more fundamental changes suggested only last week by the committee on political reform.

Muslim leftists on the committee and some Beirut newspapers are attacking the Christians for refusing to make greater concessions and Karami for his willingness to compromise. One such leftist, Baath Party leader Assam Qansu, has threatened that he may withdraw from the reform committee.

EGYPT-USSR

A Soviet delegation will arrive in Cairo today to continue talks on rescheduling Egypt's debt to the USSR. It seems unlikely that the two governments will reach agreement.

President Sadat has claimed that the total Egyptian debt to the USSR is \$4 billion, most of which is for military purchases. The Egyptians want a ten-year moratorium and the right to make future payments in goods rather than in hard currency.

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The Soviets are likely to come up with some counterproposals, but they will probably fall far short of meeting Egyptian demands. The Soviets will also discuss trade relations with the Egyptians.

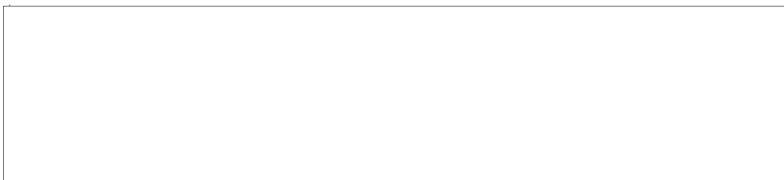
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By continuing the debt discussions, Moscow hopes to suggest flexibility in its position and to indicate that responsibility for any further deterioration in relations rests with Sadat. The Soviets apparently plan to maintain pressure on Cairo until Sadat makes some specific political gesture acceptable to Moscow.

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ANGOLA

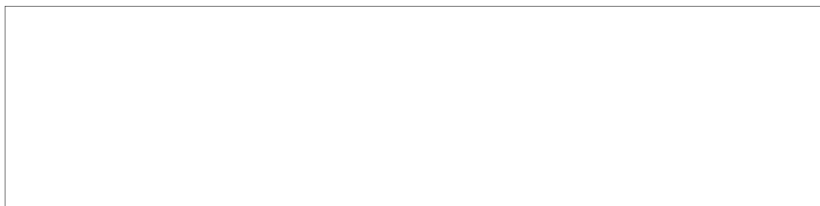
Despite the recent successes in their joint military operations, the National Front and the National Union have been unable to agree on the structure or the leadership of the "government" they proclaimed on independence day, November 11.



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The National Front's Holden Roberto and the National Union's Jonas Savimbi seem to be hesitating about too close an identification with the joint government for fear of compromising their postwar political ambitions.

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NOTES

Portugal's Prime Minister Azevedo is said to be ready to make some changes in his government in reaction to the recent Communist-led attacks on government ministries.

The changes being considered reportedly do not involve any officials above the sub-cabinet level. Shifts even at that level, however, could be significant if they involve the politically sensitive labor or social communications ministries, which have borne the brunt of the Communist offensive. A reshuffle in these ministries might mollify the opposition temporarily and buy some time for the government, but it would be unlikely to have any sustained effect upon the Communists' drive to gain greater representation in the government and the ruling Revolutionary Council.

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The government and press in Israel are reacting sharply to the statement on the Palestinian question made last week by Deputy Assistant Saunders.

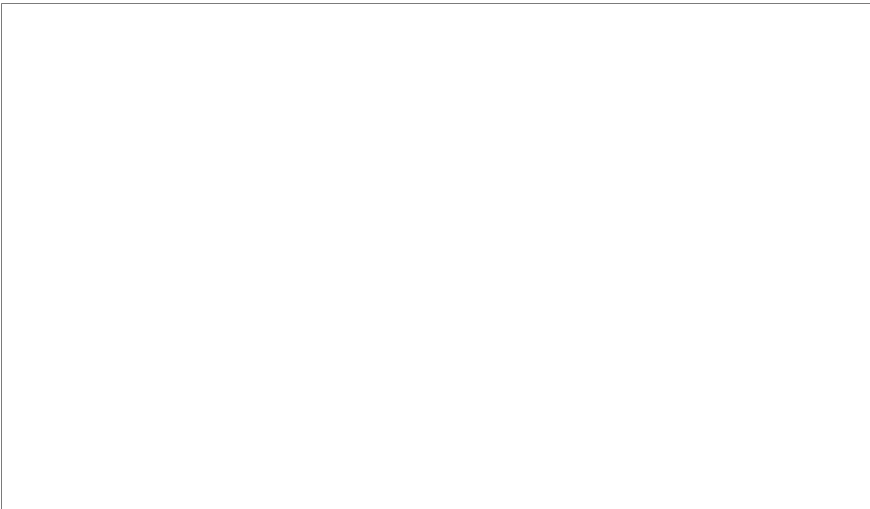
After the regular Israeli cabinet session on Sunday, a communiqué said all ministers had strongly criticized the Saunders statement, claiming it contained errors and distortions. Government officials reportedly are concerned by what they believe is the statement's assumption that the main obstacle to peace is the Palestinian problem rather than the Arab refusal to recognize Israel. They also are worried that it may be the first step in a US campaign designed to convince the Israelis eventually to accept the PLO as a negotiating partner.

There appears to be a widespread feeling in Israel that Washington is now emphasizing the Palestinian question because it has begun to take seriously Syrian President Asad's repeated assertions that he will not enter into talks on a settlement with Israel unless the Palestinian issue is included.

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The Soviet Union successfully launched an unmanned Soyuz spacecraft, Soyuz 20, into Earth orbit yesterday.

The craft is in position to rendezvous and dock--probably today--with the Salyut 4 space station, which has been in orbit since December 1974. Indications are that the mission will last about 90 days and will check out the reliability of spacecraft systems in preparation for a manned flight of long duration next year.

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The Canadian cabinet's committee on priorities has decided to maintain Canada's land and air forces in Europe at their current levels.



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The committee's decision is tantamount to full cabinet approval. The committee is chaired by Prime Minister Trudeau and includes the ministers of finance and external affairs. The modernization of Canada's forces assigned to NATO apparently will be delayed to accord with the government's efforts to cut spending.

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A high-level Thai government official has privately assured the US embassy that Foreign Minister Chatchai was not speaking for the Thai government two weeks ago when he claimed that Bangkok had decided to return US aircraft to Laos.

Chatchai's failure to raise the question with the US ambassador last week is a further indication that he has been overruled by Prime Minister Khukrit. The Thai government maintains the position that disposition of the aircraft should be settled directly by the US with Laos and Vietnam. A new clash between Thai and Lao forces along the Mekong River border erupted yesterday and was continuing early today. It will likely further harden Bangkok's position against sending back the planes.

* * *

The Chinese have made clear their displeasure over North Korea's suspension of diplomatic relations with Australia.

As the Australians prepared to leave Pyongyang, the Chinese ambassador shook hands with each of them in full view of Korean officials. The Chinese also made a special effort to facilitate issuance of Chinese visas to the Australians, who traveled through Peking on their way home. Although Peking will not make a major issue of the incident with Pyongyang, the Chinese almost certainly hope to make it clear to Australia--and probably other countries--that they played no part in North Korea's over reaction to Australian handling of the Korean question at the UN.

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